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ABSTRACT

Because of their special ties to the community, community-based organizations (CBOs) are often able to be more responsive to the needs of local or special populations than can mainstream institutions such as schools and government-funded employment services. CBOs such as Service Employment Redevelopment (SER), the National Urban League, and Operation Mainstream have been especially effective in working with disabled, disadvantaged, minority, and limited-English speaking individuals. Despite their advantages, most CBOs are not in a position to provide the highest-quality vocational programs on their own--hence the need for collaboration between CBOs and vocational education. A wide array of partnerships are possible, depending on such factors as the size and resources of the CBO in question, its target clientele, its overall goals, and the types and extent of services that it has developed on its own. Possible foci for partnerships between a CBO and vocational education include vocational orientation and counseling, remedial education, career education in an alternative high school setting, employment and work experience programs, and combined/comprehensive programs. The barriers that have been found to interfere with some CBO/vocational education partnerships, such as "turf" problems, unwillingness to expend funds for services that another agency can provide, and interagency competition for clients, can often be overcome by careful preliminary planning and face-to-face meetings between the collaborating parties to foster an understanding of each other's goals and concerns and to develop mutually suitable goals and strategies. The Opportunities Academy of Management Training has developed a 12-point plan for establishing local partnerships and a 7-point plan for establishing state partnerships. (MN)

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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Overview

ERIC DIGEST NO, 66

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OVERVIEW

ERIC DIGEST NO. 66

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Community-based organizations (CBOs) have a strong tradition of providing effective vocational services to special groups, including disabled, disadvantaged, and limited-English speaking individuals. This Digest discusses the evolution of CBOs and their past, present, and future role in vocational education. Special emphasis is placed on the features of CBOs that make them effective partners in vocational training programs, some of the barriers that have stood in the way of successful partnerships, and procedures for developing and implementing effective partnerships between vocational education and CBOs.

What Are CBOs and Why Are They Necessary?

Since the term "community-based organization" first came into use in the 1960s, its meaning has changed considerably. Initially, the term was used in a rather narrow sense to refer to private, nonprofit organizations that (1) claimed to represent ethnic, minority, and other low-income groups, (2) were to be run by representatives of these groups, and (3) planned to gear their services toward meeting the needs of disadvantaged persons (Bailis 1987). By the mid-1980s, however, the term "CBO" had begun to be viewed more broadly and applied to any nonprofit organization claiming to serve the community, without any limitations based on membership in a minority group or income level (Bailis 1987).

CBOs were initially funded under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), which stated that "due consideration" be given to "community-based organizations of demonstrated effectiveness" and which mentioned five specific groups (the black-oriented Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America, the Hispanic-oriented SER [Service Employment Redevelopment], the National Urban League, local community action agencies, and Operation Mainstream, an organization providing public service employment to senior citizens). CBOs received additional funding under the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act of 1977. Most recently, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act required states to provide financial assistance to joint programs of eligible Title I recipients and CBOs in such areas as outreach, transitional services, prevocational educational preparation, prevocational programs targeted to special needs groups (including inner-city, rural, non-English speaking, and impoverished youth), career intern programs, assessment of students with respect to vocational education and jobs, and guidance and counseling (Bailis 1987).

There appears to be a general consensus that the neighborhood (community) focus of CBOs enables them to relate to, know, and thus be more responsive to the needs of local or special populations than mainstream institutions (such as schools and state- or national-level employment services) can be. For this reason, Bailis (1987) asserts that when dealing with special needs persons (especially disadvantaged, minority, or limited-English speaking), CBOs are more effective than their mainstream vocational education counterparts in organizing and delivering such prevocational services as outreach and recruitment, intake and assessment, counseling and career guidance, and motivational programs. Poulard (1983) attributes the special effectiveness of CBOs in working with disadvantaged and minority clients to "the business acumen, the people-orientation, the command of the content of a program area, the flexible operations of the training program, the commitment to follow-through with a program for the placement of graduates, and the accountability back to the neighborhood" (p. 4).

Benefits of Partnerships

As Bailis (1987) points out, despite their advantages from the standpoint of understanding their clients' unique problems and needs and commanding their trust, most CBOs are not in a position to provide the highest-quality vocational programs on their own. Hence the need for collaboration between CBOs and vocational education. The partnership between Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) and SER that was made possible after IBM donated a $150,000 computer system (Zaragoza and Huber 1987) illustrates some specific contributions to be made and benefits to be derived from a partnership among a CBO, a postsecondary institution, and a private sector corporation. Each party brought an essential element to the partnership: IBM supplied the necessary educational equipment; SER provided the necessary classroom space and capacity to recruit students, screen them, and provide them with counseling and other supportive services; and MATC supplied instructors who were capable of teaching customized courses for data entry operators and an employer who was willing to hire SER students once they gained the necessary skills. Perhaps even more important, each member of the partnership has benefited from its collaborative venture: IBM and Automated Data Entry (the firm that agreed to hire the trained workers) reaped the benefits of positive publicity; MATC managed to build a bridge between itself and a large Hispanic community, which has served as a feeder of students into the college; and from SER's perspective, the partnership provided additional credibility and justification for funding requests.

What Types of Partnerships Are Possible?

A wide array of partnerships are possible, depending on such factors as the size and resources of the individual CBO involved in the partnership, its target clientele, its overall goals, and the types and extent of services that it has developed during the course of its existence. The program development model proposed by the Opportunities Academy of Management Training, Inc. (1986), includes the following components: client identification; assessment of client needs; development of a service plan; allocation of resources for services and placement; delivery of prevocational/ basic skills, education and training, and job development and placement services; and evaluation and followup. Possible types of prevocational training include occupational exploration, labor market information, job survival and basic skills, bilingual and literacy training, and job search and transition skills. On-the-job training, classroom instruction, work experience training, and preparation for apprenticeship are among the types of education and training services that can be provided through a partnership arrangement.

In his discussion of the range of expertise that CBOs can bring to partnerships with vocational education, Bailis (1987) mentions the following six program foci: vocational orientation and counseling, remedial education, career education in an

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alternative high school setting, employment and work experience programs, combined/comprehensive programs, and innovative approaches. Examples of innovative approaches described by Bailis are Jobs for Youth, a program that provides business training, capital, and technical assistance to eligible Boston youth desiring to start their own businesses; and The Foundation Collaborative Summer Youth Employment Career/Vocational Exploration Program, a Philadelphia area program that offers 6-week, 20-hour-a-week placements in private sector, career-oriented summer jobs for inschool disadvantaged youth and 8-week, 35-hour-a-week jobs for college students to monitor the youth and perform related administrative tasks.

Overcoming Barriers to Successful Partnerships

In its technical assistance guide to forming partnerships between vocational education and CBOs, the Opportunities Academy of Management Training, Inc. (1986) lists the tradition of isolationism among business, vocational education, and CBOs as the greatest barrier to successful partnerships with CBOs. The guide mentions "turf protection, unwillingness to expend funds for services that another agency can provide, and competition among agencies for clients" (p. 15) as problems that have posed coordination problems even among CBOs, let alone between CBOs and vocational education.

Bailis (1987) suggests some strategies for overcoming various technical barriers to successful partnerships with CBOs. Differences in the funding cycles of the vocational education institution and CBO involved in a given partnership can be overcome by having the CBO be flexible about adopting a longer term plan. Differences in perspectives, although somewhat more difficult to resolve, may often be eased by face-to-face meetings between representatives from both parties involved in the partnership. Concerns about CBO fiscal and accounting systems, which may indeed be real, may be alleviated by such strategies as contracting to CBOs that have demonstrated an ability to manage and account for funds, working with CBOs to develop appropriate accounting procedures, or using intermediate organizations to ensure that the CBOs can develop accounting procedures that can meet the requirements established by school system accounting departments.

Developing and Maintaining Partnerships between Vocational Education and CBOs

The technical assistance guide published by the Opportunities Academy of Management Training, Inc. (1986) includes the following 12-point plan for establishing local partnerships:

- Assessing agency capabilities
- Identifying the best role for the agency within the frame work of the planned Service Delivery Area (SDA) (or the area served by the given Private Industry Council [PIC]) and determining the appropriate scope of the work
- Preparing information on the strengths of the CBO and vocational educational institution that are to work as partners
- Providing no-cost inservice training
- Seeking membership in the local PIC
- Attending PIC and PIC subcommittee meetings
- Reviewing and submitting testimony on the job training plan developed
- Being open to multiple methods of partnership
- Visiting the vocational education schools and other service providers
- Exploring joint activities
- Exploring multiple funding sources
- Accepting factors that are beyond the control of the CBO and the vocational educational institution

The academy's 7-point plan for establishing state partnerships calls for identifying overlapping education and training services and responsibilities; developing a database for access to information, an interagency communication system, an education and training state-level resource center, and guidelines for partnerships between vocational educational institutions and CBOs in individual SDAs; using client-based subcommittees to encourage interagency cooperation; and disseminating information on successful collaborative ventures between CBOs and vocational education.

When selecting a CBO with which to collaborate, Zaragoza and Huber (1987) recommend picking an organization that has a solid track record in the area of employment and training, good linkages with area employers, a strong business advisory committee, and consistency in meeting contract requirements. They suggest contacting the local private industry council and requesting information about local CBOs funded by the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA).

Descriptions of exemplary partnerships between CBOs and the vocational education sector are included in Bailis (1987) and the Opportunities Academy guide (1986).

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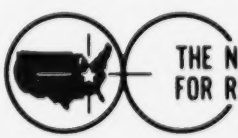

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